

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUSTICE ALLIANCE

Education Committee

SB 1095: An Act Concerning School Resource Officers

IN FAVOR OF SB 1095



February 28, 2023

Dear chairs Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, and members of the Education Committee,

My Name Is Iliana Pujols and I am a resident of East Haven, Connecticut. I am the Policy Director at the Connecticut Justice Alliance and I am testifying In support of S.B. No.1095: An Act Concerning the Use of School Resource Officers In Connecticut Schools.

I strongly support the need to create clear expectations of when a school resource officer is and is not needed and what their role should be. I went to school in West Haven & New Haven, including an alternative school, and had a fair share of experience with SROs. I heard many points made that we need to take a look at why experiences with school resource officers are different from one district to another. And many have. There's tons of data explaining the reality of the school-to-prison pipeline, education inequities, housing inequities, how students of color are impacted more than their white peers, and more. For those who may be interested, specific to the impact of SROs, CT Voices for Children released a pretty thorough report last year discussing this exactly. The million-dollar question of why are the experiences different from one town to another is a real one. Why do Bridgeport schools go without paper and Fairfield doesn't? Why do black youth make up 12% of CTs population but almost 45% of the incarcerated youth population? Many discussions like those are rooted in the importance of this bill and a discussion for another day, and more than 3 minutes.

I heard the expression of needing to keep schools safe due to situations such as the one that took place in Sandy Hook. And that is valid. It becomes a sticky conversation when we take a look at how we chose to put that safety into place. Why after Sandy Hook are we able to see a high increase in SROs in predominantly schools filled with students of color specifically?

I can understand how this bill may confuse some and create the assumption that this bill is anti-police and focused on removing police from schools, and it's not. What it is is a bill that forces us to create a standard expectation for those school resource officers that are put in place to protect schools and students.

What does a solution look like? Take a look at Bridgeport. Their school resource officers were so heavily depended on for pretty much any crisis response that Officer Collazo has done a great job at holding the school accountable for using the resources they have: guidance counselors, mental

health professionals, credible messengers, etc. Officers are close enough to protect but far enough to not be depended on for regular child behavior. Oregon has a crisis response team they use instead of calling officers as a first step. Louisiana has a Dads on Duty program that utilizes community-based dads to manage crises in the school. New York utilizes their Credible Messengers Justice Center to intervene in crisis situations with kids in and out of schools, and even in locked facilities. So let's explore what safety looks like and could look like if we stop requiring school resources officers to manage child behavior and mental health crisis. We have to commit to protecting our students and children of color, and this bill is a great step in that direction.

As a part of my role at CTJA, we get to host community conversations with people across the state to discuss how to solve the root issues leading kids into the system. We've spoken with groups of SROs that have shared their frustration about being called way too much by teachers for things they shouldn't be called for. So let's address that issue and remove that burden from all parties involved. This bill is a way to hold everyone accountable. I appreciate the opportunity to speak today and wish I could be there in person.

Thank you for your time,
Iliana Pujols